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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5999
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3693
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3552
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4241
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4180
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1311
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: STATELESSNESS MORE OF A PROBLEM THAN
NUMBERS SUGGEST

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: At a recent conference on statelessness in Central Asia, participants from Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan exchanged ideas on best practices for identifying people without citizenship documentation and for preventing future cases of statelessness. None of the Central Asian countries are signatories to either of the UN Conventions on statelessness, but they are bound to protect stateless people under other UN treaty obligations. In Turkmenistan there are more than 12,000 people without citizenship documentation. The Turkmen Government is working with UNHCR to discover whether these people are citizens of other former Soviet countries, who got caught between bureaucracies at the fall of the Soviet Union, or whether these people can be categorized officially as stateless. Turkmenistan has not yet proposed any changes to its citizenship laws to prevent future cases of statelessness.
END SUMMARY.

QCENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES SHARING DATA AND BEST PRACTICES

12. (C) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in conjunction with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) held a conference on December 9-10 in Ashgabat on the topic of statelessness. The goal was for Central Asian countries to exchange ideas on best practices for identifying stateless people in their countries, for taking steps to remedy the current problem, and for preventing future instances of statelessness. Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan sent participants from government agencies. There were also UNHCR and NGO representatives present from those countries. Uzbekistan did not participate because it claims not to have any stateless people within its borders, much like it claims not to have a problem with gender inequality, according to the Tashkent-based United Nations Population Fund representative.

13. (SBU) The opening presenter, Mark Manly, the head of the

Statelessness Unit at UNHCR in Geneva, noted that the magnitude of the problem of statelessness in post-Soviet successor states is still not fully understood. An estimated 12 million people worldwide are considered stateless. None of the Central Asian countries have signed either of the two UN conventions on statelessness -- the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. However, all Central Asian countries are party to treaties that have elements of protecting stateless persons, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. For instance, the Rights of the Child convention requires that a state provide education to all children within its borders, not just citizen children, according to the Turkmenistan UNICEF country representative.

14. (SBU) Keymir Orazov, a UNHCR regional consultant based in Almaty, presented data on statelessness in Central Asia. He differentiated between people with unclear citizenship status versus people who are officially stateless. Those whose citizenship status is unclear may be citizens of a country other than the one in which they reside, but they do not have the documentation to prove it. In Kazakhstan 7,383 people are registered as stateless and in Tajikistan around 3,000 people are stateless, most of whom came from Afghanistan. In Turkmenistan there are approximately 12,000 people who do not have citizenship documentation, and in Kyrgyzstan the citizenship status of more than 20,000 people is unclear.

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The groups of people most at risk of being stateless are those got caught between changing bureaucracies at the fall of the Soviet Union, those from mixed ethnicity marriages, children of mixed marriages, and labor migrants.

STATELESSNESS IN TURKMENISTAN

15. (SBU) The Deputy Chairman of the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan, Annamuhamed Khodjamgulyev, presented Turkmenistan's experiences with trying to identify and obtain citizenship for stateless people. The Turkmen Government worked closely with UNHCR to conduct surveys and found a group of approximately 10,000 ethnic Turkmen that had come from Tajikistan as refugees from the Tajik Civil War. Between 2004-05 the Turkmenistan Migration Service worked with UNHCR to register this group, and in 2005 former president Niyazov issued a decree granting Turkmen citizenship to the entire group. Brita Helleland, the UNHCR Turkmenistan Country Representative, noted that this group of former refugees settled mostly along the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border and established productive farming communities.

16. (SBU) Even after the refugee group from Tajikistan was granted citizenship, there remain approximately 12,000 adults in Turkmenistan without citizenship documentation. Helleland added that since this number was only taking adults into account. The total number of people in Turkmenistan with unclear citizenship status was probably closer to 20,000. Most of those are former Soviet citizens. Orazov opined that these are likely people who were not registered as being permanent residents of Turkmenistan at the fall of the Soviet Union and so did not automatically get citizenship. However, he said they also did not take advantage of the opportunity during Turkmenistan's first year of independence to apply for citizenship. Orazov added that, alternatively, they might have come to Turkmenistan without documentation during the 1990s when Turkmenistan participated in the Commonwealth of Independent States visa-free regime. Of this group, about 750 have been given Turkmen citizenship. UNHCR is coordinating efforts to contact other former Soviet countries to ascertain whether they have records showing that any of these people are citizens of another country.

AN ASIDE ON LOW GOVERNMENT SALARIES

¶7. (C) In a side conversation with Poloff, one of the Turkmen Government representatives, a woman who hears citizens' complaints at the Supreme Court, said that average government salaries in Turkmenistan are low, between 600-800 manat (\$200-300) per month. She added that even the highest salaries are only 1200 manat (\$420) a month. She qualified this by saying that at least it was steady money, unlike working for a private business.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The character of the Turkmen Government participation in this conference was distinctly different from the participation of the other Central Asian participants. Aside from the formal presentation by the Deputy Chairman of the State Migration Service, none of the Turkmen participants asked questions or volunteered information. Participants from the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan delegations, in contrast, asked questions about steps the other participants took and contributed examples of successful actions they had taken. This may simply have been because the Turkmen participants were not experts on statelessness problems. For example, neither the woman from the Supreme Court nor the representative from the International Department of the Ministry of Justice worked on these issues. This seems to indicate that, although Turkmenistan is working with UNHCR, they do not take the

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problem of statelessness as seriously as their neighbors, if the attendance by less than appropriate officials was any indication. The Turkmen Government, also in contrast to the other Central Asian states, did not mention any proposals to change citizenship laws in order to prevent future instances of statelessness. END COMMENT.
CURRAN